

Before the
**COMMITTEE ON INDIAN AFFAIRS
UNITED STATES SENATE**

Statement of
THE AMERICAN TRUCKING ASSOCIATIONS, INC.

On
**NATIVE AMERICAN COMMERCIAL DRIVING TRAINING
AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE ACT**

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Driving Trucking's Success

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INTRODUCTION

Chairman Inouye, Senator Campbell, members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to express the trucking industry's perspectives regarding truck driving training issues and, more specifically, Senate Bill S. 1344, the "Native American Commercial Driver Training and Technical Assistance Act." I am David Fluke, a professional truck driver for FedEx Freight West based in California, a distinguished member of the American Trucking Association's America's Road Team, and a proud member of the Cherokee Nation. I have driven large trucks professionally in the U.S. for 18 years, and am proud to communicate to you that I have logged over 1.8 million accident-free and citation-free miles behind the wheel in my driving career. Additionally, I have competed in four truck driving championship events and, in 2001, represented FedEx at the National Truck Driving Championships. I am also pleased to note that I have won numerous FedEx safety awards, including the prestigious President's Award.

I am appearing before the Committee today on behalf of the American Trucking Associations, Inc. (ATA). ATA is the national trade association of the trucking industry. ATA is a federation of affiliated State trucking associations, conferences, and other organizations that together include more than 35,000 motor-carrier members, representing every type and class of motor carrier in the nation. ATA represents an industry that employs nearly ten million people in our great country, providing one out of every fourteen civilian jobs. This includes the more than 3 million professional truck drivers who travel over 400 billion miles per year to deliver to Americans 87 per cent of their transported food, clothing, finished products, raw materials, and other items.¹

ATA supports S. 1344 and commends Senator Campbell for its introduction.

PROFESSIONAL DRIVERS – TRUCKING'S REAL TIME REPRESENTATIVES

Looking at the industry figures mentioned above, you can readily see that the old adage, "*If you got it, a truck brought it,*" is truer now than it has ever been. While trucking may not be the most glamorous industry, it is definitely one of the most essential industries to the American economy. Every business and every person in this country relies on trucks to move America's goods safely and efficiently. Drivers, of course, are the key to delivering the freight on time, every time. In fact, the keys to a thriving trucking business are literally and figuratively in the hands of the company's professional drivers. And, while professional driving continues to become more complex, requiring more sophisticated skills and a higher tolerance of stress than ever before, I am pleased to report that truck drivers are delivering the goods more safely and more efficiently than ever before.

According to the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA), the safety trends in the trucking industry are clearly heading in the right direction. In their most recent report entitled, "Large Truck Crash Facts 2000," FMCSA reports that over the last 20 years (1980 to 2000), the **fatal crash rate** for large trucks has **declined** from 4.6 fatal crashes per 100 million miles traveled to 2.2 fatal

¹ 87.3 percent by revenue. American Trucking Associations, U.S. Freight Transportation Forecast to 2013, 2002.

crashes per 100 million miles traveled, a **52 percent decrease**. FMCSA also reports that the large truck injury and property damage crash rates are also on the decline. From 1988 to 2000 (1988 was the first year in which FMCSA's predecessor agency began collecting and analyzing injury and property damage crash data), the large truck injury crash rate has declined from 67.9 injury crashes per 100 million miles to 46.8 injury crashes per 100 million miles, a **31 percent decline**. Similarly, the property damage only crash rate has declined between 1988 and 2000 from 210.7 crashes per 100 million miles to 163.7 crashes per 100 million miles, a **22 percent decline**. FMCSA also reports that alcohol involvement for large truck drivers involved in fatal crashes has declined **73 percent** since 1982, the first year that the U.S. Department of Transportation's Fatality Analysis Reporting System (FARS) included data for alcohol involvement in fatal crashes. It is for these and other reasons that professional drivers like myself are proud of our profession and the industry we work within.

ATA'S LONGSTANDING INVOLVEMENT IN DRIVER TRAINING ISSUES

ATA and its members have been involved in driver training issues since ATA's establishment in the 1930's. The reason for ATA's longstanding involvement is simple--well-trained drivers are safe drivers, and safe drivers save companies money. They are also more productive drivers, good caretakers of their equipment, and they are more adept at customer relations. Company investments in training and driver development result in improved safety performance and a reduction in personnel problems.

While ATA has been active in many driver training initiatives, two are of particular note. The first is ATA's support for the Professional Truck Driver Institute (PTDI). Established in 1986, PTDI has become the nation's foremost advocate of optimum standards and professionalism for entry-level truck driver training. The Institute is credited with developing the first voluntary curriculum and voluntary standards recognized by both the industry and government. PTDI also provides a forum through which the key stakeholders--insurers, training schools, and motor carriers are able to help assure that America's entry-level drivers have been properly trained and are competent to enter the industry. ATA supports the mission of PTDI, and has provided both financial and technical assistance to the Institute for many years. In fact, PTDI is managed by the Truckload Carriers Association, an ATA-affiliated organization.

Additionally, ATA was one of the founding members of the Driver Training and Development Alliance in 1994. In early 1990's, trucking industry association managers agreed that motor carriers were making progress in implementing and managing voluntary driver training and development programs, but that more could be done. In mid-1994, fourteen trucking-related associations agreed to form the Driver Training and Development Alliance in order to gather, disseminate and promote successful voluntary driver training programs and activities. Throughout the 1990's, the Alliance sponsored annual forums for stakeholders to discuss and advance key training issues, it created a practical guide to identify commercial drivers at higher risk for accidents and violations and established effective countermeasures, and its members assisted in reviewing and improving PTDI's certification process for entry-level driver training programs. Through its involvement in these organizations, ATA has been a driving force in improving both entry-level and in-service driver training.

THE DRIVER SHORTAGE IS REAL - INCREASING THE QUALIFIED DRIVER POOL IS CRITICAL

Unfortunately, the trucking industry has been plagued with a chronic shortage of qualified drivers. Although the shortage eased in 2001 as a result of the economic recession, the shortage is again becoming evident as the economy begins to move forward. David Goodson, former editor of the National Survey of Driver Wages, and now an industry consultant said recently "the demographics that created the driver shortage haven't changed. Not enough new young drivers are coming into the industry and the shortage appeared to be over in 2001 only because the recession cut the demand for trucking services so severely."²

ATA estimates that the trucking industry will need more than 80,000 new professional drivers each year for the foreseeable future. The industry will need approximately 35,000 qualified drivers because of industry growth and another 45-50,000 qualified drivers due to attrition, either from retirement or leaving the profession altogether.³ Thus, programs and initiatives aimed at expanding the pool of potential drivers are welcomed.

Additionally, the changing demographics of this country have clearly changed the trucking industry's recruiting practices. In its early days, trucking drew young, white males who sought independence and wanted to use the open road to see the country. Minorities are growing dramatically as a percentage of the U.S. population and, as a result, the industry is actively recruiting more drivers from minority groups (i.e., Hispanics, African-Americans, Native Americans, etc.). Also, the industry is now recruiting heavily in areas other than the large population centers. As an example, if there is a confluence of Interstate highways in a rural area, carriers will seek to employ people who live in that area because it is easier to get them home on a more regular basis.

ATA SUPPORTS S. 1344

ATA supports the efforts of Senator Campbell and the Committee on Indian Affairs to promote professional truck driver training programs at tribally-controlled community colleges. If passed, S. 1344 holds the potential to provide a good career to many Native Americans interested in having an exciting career while moving America's economy. Professional truck driving is a career that more than 3 million Americans currently call their own. It is also a job that offers an opportunity to make a good wage--the average truck driver currently makes more than \$40,000 annually. At the same time that this bill would provide opportunities for Native Americans, it will be assisting the trucking industry by expanding the pool of qualified driver candidates--an expansion that is sorely needed. S. 1344 offers the proverbial "win-win" scenario.

² Transport Topics, July 15, 2002.

³ Empty Seats and Musical Chairs, The Gallup Organization, October 1997.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, once again thank you for the opportunity to offer our thoughts on professional truck driver training issues and on S. 1344. We look forward to working with the Committee in any way we can to put more well trained and qualified drivers on the road.